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Premature *Perestroika*: the Dutch Communist Party and Gorbachev

The reaction of the Communist Party of the Netherlands (CPN) to *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the reforms with which Soviet Party secretary Michael Gorbachev surprised the world after his coming to power in 1985, was in essence '*déjà vu*'. Basically, the CPN believed that it had itself had gone through a process of reconstruction in the early eighties in a way which anticipated the reforms initiated in the Soviet Union, although, of course, the scale and setting were completely different. Because of its premature renovation, the CPN assigned itself a position in the modernizing *avant garde* of the international Communist movement.

In this chapter, the response of the CPN to Gorbachev will be described. Some attention, however, has to be paid first to the metamorphosis the CPN underwent at the beginning of the 1980s, especially with reference to its international standpoint and its reappraisal of Leninism and 'really existing socialism'. The changes which came about in this area were determinant in the attitude the CPN adopted later. In addition, the somewhat ambivalent reactions to the downfall of Eastern European socialism within the CPN will be discussed. Although the Dutch Communists had already decided in principle on co-operation with the Radical Party (PPR) and the Pacifist-Socialist Party (PSP) within the framework of a new environmental political formation called 'Green Left' (Groen Links), the tearing down of the 'iron curtain' certainly contributed to the decision to merge completely with PPR and PSP in Green Left and to dissolve the CPN in June 1991. Hence before describing the modernized CPN of the eighties, its existence as an orthodox Communist Party and in particular its less orthodox relation to the Soviet Union must be examined. From the early sixties to the middle of the seventies, the CPN was one of the byways of the international Communist movement. During this period, the CPN distanced itself from Moscow's leading role within world Communism (although it did not dissociate itself from Soviet theory and practice), later on the CPN would boast of this 'autonomous' position and describe itself as 'pioneering'.

The Orthodox CPN

The history of the CPN stretches back to before the Russian Revolution. In the Netherlands, the split between reformists and revolutionaries within the labour movement had already taken place in 1909. This gave the CPN a certain independence when the Communist International was set up. However, Moscow quickly gained control of the Dutch Communists, like every other Party it was 'bolshevised' by the mid-1920s.

After the Second World War, the CPN returned to legality as the political satellite of the Soviet Union and during the Cold War, the party completely identified itself with Moscow. In international affairs, the CPN espoused the so-called 'theory of the two camps' and the CPN accused the capitalist camp, led by the United States, of preparing a third World War. Only through the efforts of the (by nature) peaceful Socialist camp headed by Moscow, said the CPN, this could be avoided. In this 'battle for peace' the CPN took part "in indissoluble solidarity with the Soviet Union." Not only because of its international role, but also because of its social system the Soviet Union was held to be a radiant example. The CPN reassured its adherents that the victory of socialism in the Soviet Union was attended "with the birth of a new type of human being...namely Socialist man, who as a priority believes the welfare of the community to be a precondition of his personal welfare." All these triumphs were attributed to Stalin, who was praised in the constitution of the CPN as "the greatest

reformer of society, teacher and statesman, who has ever led progressive humanity."¹

Destalinisation, which was started in 1956 by Khrushchev's secret speech, shocked the Dutch Communists. The CPN executive announced that Stalin had made some mistakes, but was still very favourable about its Soviet mentor. Yet the party leadership regretted that it had defended the personality cult to the Dutch public, and stated that it would never again support actions in other countries if these fell outside of its area of knowledge."² Non-interference in other parties (confirmed by the Eighteenth Congress of the CPN in October 1956) was a prelude to the concept of 'autonomy' to which the CPN was converted in the sixties. Togliatti's concept of 'polycentrism', however, was strongly criticised by the CPN: the leading role of the Soviet Union was not in question. In fact, the CPN was *plus royaliste que le roi*. The introduction of the idea of 'noninterference' seemed to be dictated only by repugnance at Khrushchev's unmasking of Stalin and was an excuse for the party not to have to face the problem of destalinisation.

The CPN as International Misfit

In the sixties, the CPN was estranged from the Soviet Union because of the conflict between Moscow and Peking. In 1963, after the breakdown of the negotiations between the two Communist powers, party secretary De Groot declared the 'autonomy' of the CPN within the international Communist movement. The impulse behind this came from the possible rupture of the special relations between the Dutch Communists and the pro-Chinese Indonesian Communist Party, which could come about because of the Sino-Soviet dispute. These parties had engaged in a common struggle against the Dutch colonial system. On the ideological disputes between Khrushchev and Mao, De Groot stated that the conflict was essentially "about economic issues, about the balance of power within the Socialist camp and within the international Communist movement." From then on, the CPN would be "responsible only to the working population of the Netherlands... Our international activities are only useful if they are made subservient to our primary tasks."³

Nevertheless, the CPN stuck to its view that the Socialist countries as such - including the Soviet Union - were the only factors promoting global peace and declared therefore that "the expansion of the Soviet sphere of influence was an historical step forward."⁴ Moreover, the CPN did not turn pro-Chinese; the emerging Maoist tendency within the party was expelled overnight, as was a small pro-Soviet group. Moscow was held responsible for the rupture in the international movement and in consequence, relations with the Soviet Union worsened. International Communist meetings were attended either by a low ranking delegation or not at all. 1967, the CPN did not celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and, one year later, the armed intervention of the Warsaw Pact in Czechoslovakia was strongly condemned as a "violation of Leninist principles".

The Eurocommunist Curse

After a short period of *détente* with Moscow around 1970, Dutch Communists' xenophobia continued: the CPN isolated itself and was vigilant against "hostile interventions."⁵ But it kept aloof not just from orthodox Parties, but also from the 'Eurocommunist' Italian, French and Spanish Parties which were trying to modernise. The CPN perceived in this European framework a new (Italian) 'centre', which was regarded as a threat to its 'autonomous' position. However, the CPN boasted that it had introduced the concept of 'autonomy' in the international Communist movement, long before 'Eurocommunists' were claiming a greater degree of independence from Moscow.

In the middle of the 1970s, this position of self-chosen isolation started to change: slowly but surely the CPN made its entry onto the international scene. In June 1976 it took part in the conference of European Communist Parties in East-Berlin and supported the resolution in which the 'autonomy' and 'independence' of all Parties was defended.⁶ The importance the conference attached to the concept of 'autonomy' as one of the basic rules of mutual relations within the international Communist movement was regarded as a victory by the CPN. Sticking to its principles, it refused to take a stand in the dispute between the Eurocommunist parties on the one hand and the Moscow-orientated orthodox ones on the other. In reality, the Dutch Communists praised the 'international peaceloving policy' of the Soviet Union and condemned 'reactionary interference in the internal affairs of the Socialist countries'.⁷

Renewal of the CPN

This temporary public courtship of the CPN with the CPSU did not bring electoral good fortune. In May 1977, the CPN lost five out of seven seats and instead of participation in government, which the party had demanded, Dutch Communism became politically marginal. This electoral defeat, however, ushered in a period of profound ideological change. First the party shook off its Stalinist coat and went on to renounce its Leninist heritage: 'Leninism' was abolished both as a theory and as an organisational model. At the same time, the new social movements managed to hold on to the CPN and during the eighties an entirely new party made its appearance, which merged into a new political formation called 'Green Left' at the end of the decade. In this landslide, the traditional view of the Socialist countries changed profoundly and the principle of the 'two camps' also perished.

The CPN's metamorphosis was preceded by a change in the social composition of its membership.⁸ Within the Communist membership industrial workers were replaced by members of the 'new middle class', who were promoting new, 'post-materialist' demands like protection of the environment and democratisation and were less attached to the Soviet Union. The newcomers conformed to the rules and traditions of the Stalinist party at first but after the disastrous parliamentary elections in 1977, intellectuals and (later) feminists rebelled against the Stalinist cadres and demanded more freedom of discussion and ideological renewal.⁹ The strife between the orthodox wing and the renovators ended in a victory for the latter. Under the pressure of the combined opposition of intellectuals and feminist members, Leninist ideology was thrown overboard in 1984; the abolition of the Leninist principle of democratic centralism followed five years later.

The new era was ushered in at the Twent-sixth Congress of January 1978. Here the strategic concept of the 'coalitions formation' was unfolded. Communists, Socialists, Progressive Christians and others were urged to link up to form an alternative to the centre-right coalition. Apart from parties, all kinds of social organizations were invited to contribute to this so-called 'democratic power formation'. Apart from these strategic changes a new ideological programme was announced in which the CPN would map out the 'Dutch road to socialism'.

Though the CPN seemed to adopt a different tone, it initially remained Marxist-Leninist: something which became manifest in its attitude towards the Socialist countries. In accordance with its 'autonomous position', the CPN did not defend everything happening in Eastern Europe, but it condemned "the reactionary interference in the internal affairs of the Socialist countries." It admitted that there were 'unsolved problems', 'contradictions in the internal development' and 'common difficulties' in the Eastern bloc, but at the same time it stated that "no party had the right to interfere in another party's affairs."¹⁰

The CPN remained committed to the orthodox 'theory of the two camps', in which the United States was escalating the arms race whereas the Soviet Union was pursuing a policy of *détente*, and was the power supporting the masses struggling for peace. Hence, "the Socialist countries are indispensable allies of the Dutch working class in the struggle against the dangers of the arms race."¹¹ At the beginning of the eighties, this Moscow-dominated stand was still predominant within the CPN: the bracketing of the Soviet Union with the United States as jointly responsible for the arms race was rejected. Any analysis which put the Soviet Union and the United States on a par ignored all distinctions between 'bellicose' capitalism and 'peace-loving' socialism, according to the CPN.¹²

Changes in International Policy

Within a few years, however, the CPN had changed this 'theory of the two camps' precisely for the traditionally-abused 'theory of the superpowers'. Though this volte-face in its international position was a part of the general metamorphosis the CPN was experiencing, two factors in particular played a role. In the first place were events which took place in the early eighties such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the military coup in Poland and the war between Vietnam and China. Then there was the success of the Netherlands peace movement, which the CPN had initiated, and which led to a kind of merger with the broader, less radical peace movement. At the same time, the CPN itself was drawn in a more 'neutral' direction.

In August 1977, the CPN started a wide campaign against the introduction of the neutron bomb which, apart from its direct aim was also intended to improve the morale of the Communist rank and file after the electoral disaster. The campaign proved to be a success; within nine months the Communists had collected more than a million signatures. The campaign improved the prestige of the CPN within the international Communist movement and contributed to the breaking of its isolation. Moreover, the Dutch Parliament was against the N-bomb and the Communist leadership decided to extend the campaign to the arms race as a whole; the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPN of June 1980 made the 'struggle for peace' a priority. The 'Stop the N-bomb, stop the arms race' committee took part in the developing broader peace movement in the early eighties and campaigned against the stationing of American Pershing II's and cruise missiles in the Netherlands in the first place, but the Soviet SS-20's were also criticised. Of course the leadership of 'Stop the N-bomb' could not do less without isolating itself and losing its gains; hence it made concessions to the peace movement.

Criticism of Soviet nuclear armament was facilitated by the change of the international policy. The unshakable faith in the 'peaceableness of the Socialist forces' was damaged firstly by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The invasion was indirectly denounced after some weeks of silence. The Communist Member of Parliament (and *éminence grise*) M. Bakker described the "one-sided military" Soviet way of acting as "an ill-fated decision", though in the last resort the United States was held responsible. The credibility of 'really existing socialism' received another blow from the military *coup d'état* in Poland. Immediately after Jaruzelski had seized power in December 1981, the coup and the subsequent repression of Solidarity were condemned by the CPN "unconditionally and unequivocally."¹³ The involvement of the CPSU in a neighbouring country was also rejected as "an intervention in Polish affairs." In an elaboration the director of the scientific bureau of the CPN repudiated the argument that the Polish military had to intervene in order to protect the safety of the Warsaw Pact as a whole. The CPN rejected the idea that "the interests of the blocs - and within these those of the strongest powers - are decisive".¹⁴

Thus in the early eighties, the CPN gradually abandoned the dogma of the Socialist bloc as its natural ally in the 'anti-imperialist' struggle. In fact, socialism as a mobilising theme was replaced by the peace movement. This simultaneous emancipation and revaluation was partly the result of the relative success of the Communist campaign against the N-bomb and the rise of the broader peace movement. The CPN argued that the maintenance of the balance of power between both superpowers had not resulted in a lasting peace; henceforth the mass struggle for peace in the capitalist world was held to be decisive. However, the view of both the Soviet Union and the United States as joint instigators of the arms race and dominators of their 'blocs' was contested within the CPN. The orthodox argued that the ideological disorientation of the CPN had resulted in the merger of 'Stop the N-bomb' into the 'pacifist, neutralist, and classless' peace movement; only a return to class-consciousness in international affairs could open a new perspective and the positive anti-imperialist contribution of the Soviet Union and the partition of the world within two camps had to be accepted.¹⁵ However, at the Twenty-eighth Congress of the CPN in November 1982, the orthodox wing suffered a heavy defeat. The Congress did not endorse the Soviet Union as an "automatic and natural ally in the struggle against the arms race."¹⁶ The party recognised that the existence of both hostile political-military blocs, one under the leadership of the United States and the other headed by the Soviet Union, had induced the arms spiral (although the CPN still saw the United States as the engine of the arms race). In order to halt escalation, both blocs, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, had to be dissolved.

Building on the Congress resolution which had put the peace struggle at the top of the agenda, the CPN started a diplomatic offensive within the International Communist and left-wing movement. This policy was consistent with its domestic coalition strategy: the CPN had contacts not only with ecologist movements elsewhere and with Polish Solidarity, but also with the CPSU and other orthodox Communist Parties. Moscow in its turn was interested in the CPN because of the hesitations the Dutch government manifested about stationing American missiles in the Netherlands. To their Soviet interlocutors the Dutch Communists made no secret of their disgust with the concept of equal military parity between East and West and the CPN advocated the dissolution of the blocs. In discussions with the CPSU, the Dutch party stated that it "did not believe the SS-20's to be a contribution to Dutch safety."¹⁷ Despite the change of line, some members of the renovating wing in the CPN believed that the party was too Moscow-minded and broke away (like Member of Parliament G. Schreuders).

Criticism of One-party System

The emancipation of the CPN from international Soviet policy was accompanied by a dissociation from the socio-political system. This criticism of the one-party system was also a part of the CPN's transformation. In this process of detachment, the Polish military *coup d'état* by General Jaruzelski was again a catalyst. The intervention of the Polish military had demonstrated the "bankruptcy of the authoritarian statist model of socialism."¹⁸ According to the CPN in its denunciation, the Polish Communist Party had blocked a real renovating popular movement and had in this way demonstrated the failure of the one-party-system. In the eyes of the Dutch Communists, democracy started from power sharing and coalitions. Restoration of all democratic rights in Poland was demanded, including the freedom of trade unions.

In the wake of the Polish events, the monolithic and totalitarian structures in Eastern Europe became increasingly the subject of criticism, which focussed on the monopoly of power by a small group within the apparatus of party and state. At the same time, the CPN

attached greater value to the unfolding new social movements in the Netherlands such as women's liberation, environmental, anti-nuclear and peace movements as partners within the hoped-for coalitions. Correspondingly, the dissident political groups in Eastern Europe which took a stand against the Socialist regimes came into its view - not only as possible alternatives to the one-party-state, but also as possible allies against the division of Europe into two blocs. This development culminated in the Twenty-eighth Party Congress of the CPN in November 1982, when the CPN expressed its sympathy with "the democratic opposition movements in Eastern European countries" and decided "not to maintain relations with the Polish and Czechoslovakian Communist Party in the circumstances."¹⁹

The New 'Marxist-Feminist' Party Programme of 1984

The criticism of the international position of the Soviet Union by the CPN and its related verdict on the domestic affairs in the 'Socialist motherland' were laid down in an entirely new declaration of principles which was ratified by the extraordinary congress of February 1984. In this declaration Leninism was exchanged for feminism as one of the 'sources of inspiration' of the CPN. Though Marxism survived, the idea of 'class-struggle' as the sole motor of history was abandoned. Instead of the sole clash between capital and labour, the declaration recognised the existence of various other 'contradictions', such as the ones between the genders, between man and nature, between North and South, and between hetero- and homosexuality. The CPN declared that it was opposed to the mixing of the policy of the state with religion or a specific ideology and rejected the identification of state with party." It supported the multi-party system as "essential to a democratic way of decision-making. Within socialism, constitutional rights... have to be guaranteed to every party, whatever their social views."²⁰

In the new declaration of principles, there was no laudatory reference to the Soviet Union. The CPN accepted the clash between West and East, but it did not side with one of the protagonists. Instead it committed itself to a 'new Socialist internationalism', which was aimed at the dissolution of the international blocs. In the CPN's programme, Moscow and Washington were again held jointly responsible for the arms race, although it was thrust upon the Socialist countries, which had "overestimated the role of military force within international relations too and underestimated the consequences of military might on the attractiveness and development of socialism."²¹ Renovating movements within 'really existing socialism' were pressured by the authorities who were manipulating the perception of an imperialist threat. The CPN expressed its support for these dissident democratic groups in Eastern Europe.

Immediately after the CPN Congress, the conservative wing proceeded to found the League of Communists of the Netherlands (*Verbond van Communisten in Nederland*: VCN). An orthodox manifesto was drawn up, based on rigid Marxist-Leninist principles such as the leading role of the Communist Party, a positive view of 'really existing socialism' and unconditional loyalty to the Soviet Union as the "fortress of peace and progress."²² The CPN was charged with 'revisionism and defeatism', because it had underestimated the power of the Socialist countries in the 'anti-imperialist battle'. The VCN asserted that by denying the class character of the struggle for peace and seeing Moscow and Washington as similar super powers, the CPN had slid down to "neutralism, anti-Sovietism and opportunism."²³ Hence, as a result of the CPN's politics, the position of the United States and NATO was objectively strengthened.

***Perestroika* before the word**

By the middle of the eighties, the CPN had been transformed. Its traditional concept of the Communist *avant garde* had been abandoned, the multiparty system had been embraced, democratic centralism had been repudiated and the party had been remodelled into a "democratic and feminist organisation",²⁴ in which pluralism, respect for minority opinions and open decision-making processes were guaranteed. It was not so surprising that the Gorbachev reforms were well received within the CPN. In the following years, both the changes in the international policy of the Soviet Union and the domestic process of renovation, in which rigid bureaucratic centralism apparently made way for more democracy, were welcomed. After a period in which the orthodox Communist Parties were scornful of the renewal of the CPN, the Dutch Communists saw prospects for their rehabilitation. Former chairman H. Hoekstra, for instance, recalled the scepticism when talking to Eastern European officials about the transformation of the CPN in the early eighties. Now he was justified. "It cannot be denied that issues that we have put on the agenda were very relevant and are nowadays central problems everywhere - in the CPSU and other Communist Parties."²⁵ According to Hoekstra, the CPN had made the running in the international Communist movement by putting these vexing questions on the agenda.

Apart from this somewhat pretentious notion of having been one of the pioneers of the modern international Communist movement, the CPN claimed to have exercised an influence on Gorbachev's change of the Soviet Union's international policy, especially the abandonment of its objective of nuclear-strategic parity with the United States. With his strategy of de-escalation, Gorbachev had rejected the search for parity of military power between the two superpowers, at least as the CPN saw it. This renunciation of the reliance on increasing armaments in order to maintain peace was regarded as a "'Copernican revolution' in the political-military way of thinking" of a superpower.²⁶ Now Gorbachev had tried to stop the war of attrition by offering fundamental concessions in order to reduce arms, despite American efforts to step up the race again by announcing the deployment of Euromissiles and the Strategic Defense Initiative.

When the arms race ended, the CPN considered itself one of the pacemakers in the Communist world. It took it for granted that conversations which were held with the CPSU in previous years had contributed to this change of direction. The official representative of the CPN at the Twenty-seventh Congress of the CPSU argued that "the discussions, the sometimes critical dialogue which the CPN had with the CPSU, have had a positive influence."²⁷ In the CPN's view, the underlying factor of Moscow's transformation of foreign policy was the growing awareness within the Soviet leadership that the 'imperialist' United States could not be stopped without the support of the peace movement of the capitalist countries. The Kremlin's analysis was believed to be a recognition of the stand which the CPN had taken for years: in order to establish a strong peace movement, Dutch Communists had not been willing to subordinate the struggle for peace to the 'class struggle' and had criticized the Western and Eastern contribution to the nuclear arms race. By exceeding narrow class bounds, the coalitions for peace could be broadened to the full.

Downfall of Socialism in Eastern Europe

Despite the renovation of the CPN, its distant from the Soviet Union and the subsequent departure of the orthodox wing, traditional affinity with Moscow still had not disappeared within the party. In welcoming Gorbachev, some within the CPN nourished hopes that Soviet communism might be able to renew itself. Members of the old guard were cherished these expectations. Bakker asked himself whether "communism might again become a fascinating

ideal... because of this large Socialist state, the Soviet Union?"²⁸ Others also hoped that Gorbachev's efforts to add democracy to the 'really existing Socialist system' might increase the political appeal of Socialist ideology. Remarkably, opinion about the Soviet Union became more positive again within the party as a whole even though Moscow seemed to have been definitively "eradicated as a source of inspiration within the CPN" in previous years.²⁹

The main reason for a revaluation of the USSR was that despite all the criticisms, the CPN still believed the Soviet socio-economic system to be essentially Socialist. An open-minded, fundamental and critical analysis of the socio-political structure of the 'really existing socialist' countries had never been undertaken, despite the party's ideological renovation. Its traditional outlook on the Soviet Union in this sense was demonstrated very clearly at the Seventieth celebration of the October Revolution in 1987. A special issue of the theoretical magazine of the CPN was dedicated to the "first succesful Socialist revolution." Moreover, at the international celebration in Moscow in November, the CPSU wished "much success in the building of socialism".³⁰ Soviet society was 'Socialist', for better or for worse; for the CPN the formal possession of the means of production by the community was apparently a sufficient basis for socialism.

The CPN between VCN and Green Left

Partly as a consequence of this second but partial revaluation of the Soviet Union within the CPN, a rapprochement appeared to be under way between the renovating and orthodox currents Dutch communism. The CPN believed that Gorbachev's policy was in line with its own policy in the early eighties. The VCN, which had followed the Soviet Union slavishly, hailed the political changes under Gorbachev as a proof of the renovating capacities of Leninism. Yet despite its insistence, the CPN (which was not represented in the Second Chamber since the elections of 1986) was not willing even to consider a reunion. Instead of merging with the orthodox Communists, the CPN entered in an electoral coalition with Radicals (PPR) and Pacifists (PSP).³¹ Under the banner 'Green Left' these parties - together with a small Progressive Christian partij and the representatives of new social movements - took six out of 150 seats, three more than the component parts had acquired separately in the previous elections. Dutch Communists re-entered the Second Chamber after an absence of three years. After the elections, the organisational development of Green Left was continued at the expense of the independence of the participating parties and in November 1990, a new party, Green Left, was officially founded. This party tried to combine ecological, 'green' demands aimed at environmental protection with traditional left-wing, 'red' issues like a just income distribution. The 'old' parties have all dissolved themselves in 1991, including the CPN (on 15 June).

Desintegration of Eastern Europe in 1989

Partly because of the hopes which were entertained for the possible appearance of a revitalised socialism of high moral standing as the result of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the revolutions behind the Iron Curtain at the end of 1989 were a cold shower for the CPN. Of course the Dutch Communists were pleased with the desintegration of the first of the two political blocks in Europe, which was consistent with their international objective. At last the spirit of peace came down on earth, but at the same time the Last Judgement was passed on the 'really existing socialism'. The events which led to the breaking up of the Warsaw Pact, shed an harsh light on the way socialism had operated in practice. And because the CPN had stuck (from its early days) to the dogma that Eastern European societies were still Socialist in

a way, the party was hit very hard by the destruction of the Iron Curtain. In general, the reaction was one of disillusionment. I. Brouwer, the last Chair of the Communist parliamentary group in the Second Chamber, wrote shortly after the events in February 1990: "What do you mean, socialism? Just a short time ago, the October Revolution of 1917 produced a worthy successor in the Revolution of 1989, which desposed away the ruling Communist Parties or compelled them to abdicate."³² Socialism turned out not to have been a guarantee against unemployment, poverty, environmental destruction and so on, but appeared to have been morally corrupt and bankrupt. Of course this was not unsuspected, but the bare truth which was revealed went far beyond what had been imagined.

Within the CPN a debate started in 1990 about the practice of socialism, in which fundamental questions were not evaded. The concept of the 'Communist vanguard' in particular was identified behind the Eastern European abuses and the besmirching of elevated Socialist ideals. Yet the CPN's affinity with the Eastern European social systems (despite all its criticisms), was not questioned during these discussions. Avoiding this painful self-analysis, the CPN turned away from the Eastern European Socialist variant - losing an illusion but not abandoning its ideals, as the party executive made clear at the beginning of 1991, a few months before the congress was going to decide about the dissociation of the CPN:

The objective of the CPN was the accomplishment of a Socialist Netherlands by the democratisation of power. This aspiration was seriously hampered in the course of time by errors and abuses in the countries which called themselves Socialist... The fact that systems have existed in the world which called themselves Socialist and which are bankrupt politically and morally, is no reason the CPN to abandon its ideals, although it has to be recognised that the support within the Eastern European countries was far deeper than assumed in the past and that the basis for Socialist ideas has been narrowed considerably because of this crisis.³³

The end of Dutch Communism

The history of the relations of the CPN with the Soviet Union is paradoxical. In the 'autonomous' phase in the sixties and early seventies, the CPN had hardly any contacts with Moscow but followed in the ideological tracks of the CPSU. In the eighties, the CPN gave up Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy and drifted away from the Soviet Union, but at the same time, however, contacts became more frequent than in the period after the Cold War. The traditional concept of socialism as a peace-loving global force could not with stand the drive to renovation after 1980. Yet the idea that the societies behind the Iron Curtain were in essence Socialist though in a rudimentary form survived the transformation and formed the link between the orthodox and the modernist phase in the relations with Moscow.

The fraternal thread was cut by the *Götterdämmerung* in Eastern Europe in 1989. Just before, the affinity with the Soviet Union had become larger again because of Gorbachev's reforms, in which the CPN recognised some of its own ideas. The impending end of the party-state and the new era of *détente* gave rise to hopes of a Socialist renaissance. Yet after the downfall of Eastern European socialism, the party could not maintain the myth of 'really existing socialism' any longer and turned away.

Thus in 1991, the CPN dissolved itself and merged into Green Left. Its route to this new political formation, however, was traced out some time before 1989, though the speed of the merger - and the corresponding dissolution of the party - was accelerated by it. As the beginning when the CPN was not the consequence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 (the existing revolutionary Marxist Party merely changed its name), so in the end the death of the party was not caused by the Eastern European revolution of 1989 alone. Above all, the dissolution of the CPN was the product of an 'autonomous' development, which - viewed in

retrospect - was ushered in by the 'premature *perestroika*' Dutch communism went through in the early eighties.

Notes

1. *De weg naar socialistisch Nederland*, Amsterdam, Brochurehandel der CPN, 1952, pp.10, 19, 24.
2. See, 'Resolutie over het twintigste congres van de CPSU', *Politiek en Cultuur*, vol. 15, 1956, pp. 309-11.
3. A.A. de Jonge, *Het communisme in Nederland: de geschiedenis van een politieke partij*, Den Haag, Kruseman, 1972, pp. 145-6.
4. D. Hellema, 'De dilemma's van Jalta', *Politiek en Cultuur*, vol. 45, 1985, p. 203.
5. 'Resolutie van het 24ste congres van de CPN', *Politiek en Cultuur*, 32 (1972), p. 333.
6. 'Voor vrede, veiligheid, samenwerking en sociale vooruitgang in Europa', in: *Politiek en Cultuur*, 36 (1976), pp. 186-205.
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